



Horace the Horrible: A Knight Meets His Match

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Jackie Urbanovic, Illustrator

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“Great galloping gargoyles!” Could it be that a fierce knight known for his dragon-slaying and ability to vanquish armies could be conquered by a hug?

Horace the Horrible, brother to the king, opens his castle door to find that his little niece, Minuette, has been sent to stay with him while her father recovers from the flu. Sir Horace, understandably, doesn't know how a small girl will fit into his adventurous and dangerous lifestyle. He tries to get out of the responsibility, but the friar who brought her pushes the child at her fierce uncle and quickly departs.

Minuette gazes the strange castle and sobs. She misses her daddy. “Oh, Daddy faddy,” said Horace. “I can do anything that swellhead can do.” He offers to take her along while he slays a dragon. When the dragon approaches, Horace tells Minuette to hand him his sword, but she gives him a stick. He shouts at her that he could have been killed, and she said so could the dragon. She tells him she still misses her daddy. Horace responds, “Oh, Daddy raddy.”

He heads into battle, but when he returns with a captured flag, Minuette notes that it is their own; he has vanquished his own forces. She sniffs that she still misses her father. “Daddy shmaddy,” said Horace as he promises to rescue a damsel in distress.

In a clever twist, Minuette becomes the damsel, and makes it quite clear to her blustery uncle that she is indeed in distress. What she wants is a hug. For that, Horace the Horrible must remove the armor that separates them—a lovely symbol of blossoming human relationships. Even though his reputation is likely to be ruined as his soft side is revealed, Horace takes the risk.

The illustrator's colorful artwork perfectly complements the humor and tenderness of this refreshing picture book. She creates an imposing Horace who barely fits on the page until he is reduced to human emotions and proportions. She has illustrated other children's books including Spaghetti Eddie and Do the Hokey Pokey.

The author is a prolific writer of more than thirty books for children and young adults. Her newest story will appeal to adults and young children on a number of levels as it touches on adjusting to new and scary situations, seeing through gruffness of adults, saying what one needs, and learning to let down one's guard and to express affection. As the redheaded Minuette would ask, “Is that so bad?”

LINDA SALISBURY (November / December 2003)

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